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INR WEEKLY HIGHLIGHTS
OF DEVELOPMENTS IN HUMAN RIGHTS

No. 42, February 2, 1978

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LATIN AMERICA

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Argentina

Recent Rights Developments. The foreign diplomatic community in Buenos Aires is expressing growing concern over the local human rights situation. Ambassador Castro's soundings have revealed agreement among diplomats from the EC countries and Sweden that conditions warrant some sort of multilateral approach to the Videla government. EC representatives are drafting a statement on the situation pursuant to directions from the EC Political Commission, but it probably will not be completed for weeks. The German, Danish, and Swedish ambassadors strongly favor a joint demarche, the French seem less enthusiastic, and the Netherlands ambassador expressed reluctance on trade grounds.

On January 25, Argentine Ambassador Aja Espil, fresh from a trip to Buenos Aires, told Department officers that President Videla's disgust over the December disappearances of the 13 persons associated with the "Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo" prompted Videla's December 23 announcement that a complete list of state-of-siege detainees would be published. Aja Espil also expressed hope that the recent appointment of

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a new police chief for Buenos Aires Province would help curb the vigilante activity of security personnel.

Judge John Carro of the New York State Supreme Court visited Buenos Aires in late January as part of a delegation from the International Federation for the Rights of Man. Interior Minister Harguindeguy told Carro that:

--the right of option program (enabling state-of-siege prisoners to petition for exile) began functioning on December 20, 1977; 115 petitions had been filed, 10 were considered and approved in December, and 43 more cases would be decided on February 15;

--there were 3,472 state-of-siege detainees as of January 20; 1,889 were arrested before the military government assumed power; 1,700 have charges pending against them, and 1,400 of those cases will be tried in civilian courts; and

--publication of the list of prisoners would begin on January 27.

Members of the Carro mission and another Paris-based human rights group also met with Navy Commander Massera. The Admiral expressed sympathy with the human rights victims, bemoaned his inability to change matters, and blamed the situation on the army. (CONFIDENTIAL, State 023405, January 28; Buenos Aires 657, January 26 and 704, January 27.)

INR Comment: Despite the promises of Videla and Harguindeguy, there is still no official published list of state-of-siege detainees. Harguindeguy may be encountering the same uncooperative attitude on the part of various security entities holding prisoners that he has faced in the past.

Massera's lament is now familiar but difficult to credit. He is a clever, unscrupulous politician whose subordinates have been guilty of human rights abuses. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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